

BAC Stakeholder Forum Briefing Note



BAC held the second annual stakeholder forum on 25 January 2021. The event was held online due to Covid-19 restrictions using the Zoom online meeting platform.

82 attendees attended the event and consisted of a mixture of accredited providers, BAC staff and inspectors as well as representatives from BAC committees.

Chaired by Dominic Scott, Chair of the Board of Trustees, the sessions included an update on the Standard Visitor Visa, update on BAC activities and inspections, feedback from the communications survey and a briefing about Micro-credentials.

Listed below is a brief overview of the topics discussed at the event.

Visa update: Presented by Paul Jeffrey and Laurence Brammer from the UK Home Office

- Review of the UK visa regime took place prior to the UK exiting the EU on 31 December.
- The Standard Visitor visa replaces the Short-Term Study Visa from 1 December 2020.
- The goal was to have a single global visa system to allow study of up to 6 months which is included with the Visitor visa.
- The requirement to be studying at an institution holding valid accreditation and listed by an accreditation body (e.g. BAC) remains one of the qualifying criteria.
- Applicants must still be able to demonstrate that they have sufficient funds to support their study. There is no defined figure for sufficient funds.
- The 11-month study visa for English language courses remains. Provider must hold valid accreditation, and be listed by an accrediting body (e.g BAC).
- There is no limit on the number of students requiring a Visitor visa that a provider can have enrolled.
- Main changes were:
 - Students can study on multiple courses during the 6-month period
 - EEA/EU are not required to have a visa in order to study
 - A potential student can decide to study when in the UK rather than having to do this in advance

BAC will be holding a webinar about visas in February. If anyone has any queries relating to the Visitor visa please email info@the-bac.org and we will collate the questions to be sent to the Home Office to seek a response. Please send your queries no later than Friday 5 February.

BAC online inspections update: Presented by Diana Morriss, BAC Chief Inspector and Steve Ingle, BAC Inspector

2020 has been a challenging year where BAC needed to maintain our accreditation and inspection activities in a different way than we had previously. The BAC Chief Inspector worked with BAC inspectors to seamlessly shift the established onsite full or interim inspections to be conducted remotely while maintaining the robustness of the process. BAC has been carrying out a number of online interim inspections for some time however all full inspections had been carried out onsite prior to the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic.

The main points that BAC wished to provide an update on are listed below:

- We undertook a pilot online full inspection for a new provider, under our College accreditation scheme, in July 2020. The inspection was carried out by one inspector and went very well. Since then BAC have carried out nine full/reaccreditation inspections which were undertaken.
- We are now starting to organise online inspections involving a team of inspectors.

BAC outlined the ways to ensure a successful online remote inspection:

- A provider should ensure they are prepared and have ensured that all documentation, sent before and during the inspection, is well labelled and organised effectively accompanied by a detailed and well evidenced self-evaluation report.
- An appropriate and reliable electronic platform that all are confident to use should be selected by the provider, ensuring that everyone has access to required technology, have checked connectivity and are familiar with how to use it.
- Ensure all the provider's staff etc will not be disturbed, either in a quiet room in the provider's premises or at home.

BAC has received positive feedback on online inspections held to date. We are planning to carry out onsite inspections again when permitted and will be following government guidance in this regard.

BAC activities update: Presented by Paolo Legaspi, Accreditation Manager

BAC has continued to operate throughout the pandemic over the last year. BAC staff have been working from home since March 2020 and operations have continued to take place albeit remotely. Listed below is an overview of the activity BAC has undertaken throughout 2020.

- BAC continues to receive applications for accreditation.
- The accreditation and inspection team continue to process applications and arrange inspections.
- Inspections are conducted remotely which will continue until further notice.
- Accreditation Committee meetings going ahead as planned and accreditation has continued to be awarded for both new and already accredited providers. There were 13 new providers awarded accreditation in 2020.
- Between January to December 2020 BAC arranged a total of 86 inspections in both the UK and overseas. After March 2020 these were conducted remotely using online meeting software due to Covid-19.
- The Online, Distance and Blended Learning scheme standards were reviewed and relaunched in 2020 and the updated scheme standards will be used for all applications for that scheme.
- BAC has arranged a series of webinars which are available free of charge to accredited providers, BAC inspectors and committee members. The list of webinars and how to register is available here: <https://www.the-bac.org/events/bac-webinars/>

BAC Communications review: Presented by Hayley Boyes, Higher Education Manager

BAC is reviewing its communications strategy and undertook a survey in order to investigate the frequency of the BAC newsletter, what type of information BAC stakeholders want from BAC and how best that information should be communicated. There was a 12% response rate to the survey with the majority of respondents from the UK. A slight majority of responses were from accredited providers.

Headline responses to the survey:

- 94% read the BAC newsletter.
- 85% felt it gave a helpful update.
- 46% prefer monthly newsletter / 46% prefer quarterly.
- The preferred methods to receive information from BAC was through the BAC newsletter, by email updates and regular webinars.

- The type of information that respondents would want to receive from BAC included a BAC activities update, UK industry and educational news, case studies about best practice, and advice and guidance.

Listed below are some of the key things that BAC will be focusing on this year:

- The newsletter will be sent out on a quarterly basis and will include policy, topical issues and market focused information in both the UK and overseas.
- There will be regular targeted email updates around specific topics (e.g. changes to schemes, Chief Executive briefing, legislative changes impacting BAC providers).
- An annual statistical report on BAC activities will be implemented to give an overview of the number of accredited providers and inspections that BAC has undertaken in the previous year.
- Production of briefing documents and guidance notes to be produced individually as well as to accompany webinars.
- Production of provider case studies demonstrating good practice on a rolling basis.
- Research building on BAC thematic reviews.

Micro-credentials – where do they sit in the current education context: Presented by Professor Mary Bishop

Micro-credentials are a current ‘hot topic’ and something that may be of interest to BAC providers. The session gave an overview of what micro-credentials are, how and who delivers them, what quality assurance or framework to they sit between.

Micro-credentials are certification-style qualifications. They are short, low-cost online courses that provide learners with a digital certification or a ‘digital badge’ when complete.

The key difference between micro-credentialling and other qualifications offered by higher education institutions – such as certificates or bachelors – is that micro-credentials are delivered as ‘bite-sized’ chunks.

A summary of the key things to be aware of are listed below:

- Micro-credentials are modularised qualifications.
- There is a common framework or characteristics of micro-credentials with the expectation that the course will take 100-150 hours of study. They are formalised learning which include summative assessment and a validation of the skills which have been gained through the course.
- Delivered at the level of the final year of an undergraduate degree (Level 6) or a postgraduate degree (Level 7) they tend to be worth 10 credits and successful completion of the course will be confirmed through a transcript and certificate.
- Anyone can offer a micro-credential as the area is currently unregulated but the value of the qualification will depend on the status and recognition of the organisation delivering it. The qualification would not be formally accredited unless it is part of an accredited programme (e.g. professional qualifications with bodies such as the ACCA).
- The type of micro-credential could be a requirement in order to operate within a regulated area (e.g. law, medicine, accountancy).
- Higher Education institutions are actively looking into micro-credentials and how they can be a stackable qualification.

If there are any questions related to micro-credentials please email info@the-bac.org and we will collate them to be sent onto Professor Mary Bishop to seek a response. Please send your queries no later than Friday 5 February.

There is a consultation about micro-credentials taking place in the UK. If you would like to respond to the consultation the link is available to do so here: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks/credit-framework-consultation>

The consultation closes on 8 February 2021.